

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Claims 1-4, 12-15 and 23-26 are pending in the present application. Claims 1-4, 12-15 and 23-26 were amended; and claims 5-11, 16-22 and 27-33 were canceled. No claims have been added. Applicants have carefully considered the cited art and the Examiner's comments, and believe the claims currently in the case patentably distinguish over the cited art and are allowable in their present form. Reconsideration of the rejection is, accordingly, respectfully requested in view of the above amendments and the following comments.

I. 35 U.S.C. § 102, Anticipation

The Examiner has rejected claims 1, 7, 8, 12, 18, 19, 23, 29 and 30 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as being anticipated by Walker et al., U.S. Patent Number 6,324,520 (hereinafter "Walker 520").

By the present Amendment, independent claims 1, 12 and 23 have been amended to incorporate subject matter previously recited in dependent claims 5, 16 and 27, respectively, which the Examiner acknowledges is not disclosed in Walker 520. The remaining claims depend from and further restrict one of independent claims 1, 12 and 23.

Therefore, the rejection of claims 1, 7, 8, 12, 18, 19, 23, 29 and 30 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) has been overcome.

II. 35 U.S.C. § 103, Obviousness

The Examiner has rejected claims 2-6, 13-17, and 24-28 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Walker 520, in view of Walker et al., U.S. Publication No. 2005/0060062 (hereinafter "Walker 062"). This rejection is respectfully traversed.

With respect to independent claims 1, 12 and 23, the Examiner states:

As per claims 1, 12 and 23, Walker 520 teaches:

A method for providing products, the method comprising:

receiving, at an automatic product/service dispensing machine in a micronetwork of proximally located diverse automatic product/service dispensing machines, a request for an item (see col 3, lines 1-7; col 13, lines 20-27);

responsive to a determination that the item is unavailable at a current automatic product/service dispensing machine, providing a user with an alternative redemption product (see col 3, lines 1-8; col 4, lines 35-40; col 7, lines 25-30).

Office Action dated October 17, 2006, pages 2-3.

With respect to claims 5, 16 and 27 the Examiner further states:

As per claims 5, 16 and 27, Walker 520 fails to teach:

The method as recited in claim 2, further comprising:

providing redirection information to the user regarding a location at which the redemption coupon may be redeemed for an item. However, Walker 062 teaches vending machines that provide customers with electronic coupons offers of alternative products of said vending machines (see Walker 062 paragraphs 188-190). Walker 062 does not expressly teach providing information where said coupon may be redeemed. However, Official Notice is taken that it is old and well known in the promotion art to indicate in a coupon offer the location (i.e. store) where said coupon offer may be redeemed. Therefore, it would have been obvious to a person of ordinary skill in the art at the time the application was made, to know that Walker 520 discount offers that are given to customers when said customers select a unavailable item in a vending machine would be a coupon offer, as the one taught by Walker 062 where said coupon offer would indicate the location where said coupon may be redeem, as it is old and well known to do so.

Office Action dated October 17, 2006, pages 5-6.

Claim 1 as amended herein is as follows:

1. A method for providing products, the method comprising:
receiving, at a first automatic product/service dispensing machine at a location in a micronetwork of proximally located diverse automatic product/service dispensing machines, a request for an item; and
responsive to a determination that the item is unavailable at the first automatic product/service dispensing machine, providing a user with redirection information regarding at least one alternative location at which the item may be obtained.

Applicants respectfully submit that neither Walker 520 nor Walker 062 nor their combination discloses or suggests "responsive to a determination that the item is unavailable at the first automatic product/service dispensing machine, providing a user with redirection information regarding at least one alternative location at which the item may be obtained" as currently recited in claim 1, and that claim 1 patentably distinguishes over the references in its present form.

Walker 520 describes a dispensing device, such as a vending machine, that is equipped to offer substitute products when, for example, a selected product is out of stock or nearing an expiration date. Walker 520, however, does not disclose or suggest providing a user with redirection information regarding an alternative location at which the selected item may be obtained when the item is unavailable at the dispensing device.

Walker 062 describes providing a user with a coupon, such as a paper or electronic coupon, when a requested product is unavailable at a dispensing device. Walker 062, however, also does not disclose or suggest providing a user with redirection information regarding an alternative location at which the selected item may be obtained when the item is unavailable at the dispensing device. In fact, Walker 062 only discloses that coupons are redeemable at the dispensing device at which the item was unavailable,

and thus teaches away from providing a user with redirection information regarding an alternative location at which an item may be obtained. For example, in paragraph [0189], Walker 062 states: "For example, a video display could indicate via text and/or graphics that coupons may be redeemed for any product in the vending machine, or for certain products in the machine." (Emphasis added.) Furthermore, in paragraph [0190] Walker 062 states: "Coupons may also take the form of an "electronic coupon", such as an indication of a numeric or alphanumeric code which may be read by or received by the vending machine." (Emphasis added.)

In rejecting original claim 5, the Examiner takes Official Notice that a coupon offer would indicate a location where the coupon may be redeemed. Although Applicants respectfully disagree with the Examiner's conclusion in this regard, even assuming, for the sake of argument, that the Examiner is correct, Applicants respectfully submit that it would still not be obvious to one skilled in the art having the references before him to provide a user with redirection information regarding at least one alternative location at which an item may be obtained responsive to a determination that the item is unavailable at a first automatic product/service dispensing machine. As indicated above, neither reference discloses providing redirection information regarding alternative locations at which a selected item may be obtained when the item is unavailable at a first dispensing device; and, in fact, Walker 062 teaches against such a conclusion as pointed out above.

Thus, neither Walker 520 nor Walker 062 nor their combination discloses or suggests "responsive to a determination that the item is unavailable at the first automatic product/service dispensing machine, providing a user with redirection information regarding at least one alternative location at which the item may be obtained" as recited in claim 1, and claim 1 patentably distinguishes over Walker 520 in view of Walker 062 in its present form.

Claims 2-4 depend from and further restrict claim 1, and also patentably distinguish over Walker 520 in view of Walker 062, at least by virtue of their dependency. In addition, these claims recite additional features that are neither disclosed nor suggested by the references. For example, claim 2 depends from claim 1 and specifies that the step of providing a user with redirection information regarding at least one alternative location at which the item may be obtained comprises "providing the user with a location of at least one second automatic product/service dispensing machine in the micronetwork of proximally located diverse automatic product/service dispensing machines." As indicated above, neither Walker 520 nor Walker 062 nor their combination teaches or suggests providing a user with redirection information, and certainly neither reference teaches or suggests providing the user with a location of at least one second automatic product/service dispensing machine in a micronetwork of proximally located diverse automatic product/service dispensing machines at which an item may be obtained.

Claim 3 depends from claim 2 and recites that the step of providing the user with a location of at least one second automatic product/service dispensing machine in the micronetwork of proximally located diverse automatic product/service dispensing machines comprises "providing directions to the location of the at least one second automatic product/service dispensing machine." For similar reasons as discussed above, the references do not disclose or suggest providing directions to alternative dispensing machines in a micronetwork of dispensing machines at which an item may be obtained.

Independent claims 12 and 23 have been amended in a similar manner as claim 1, and patentably distinguish over Walker 520 in view of Walker 062 for similar reasons as discussed above with respect to claim 1. Claims 13-15 depend from and further restrict claim 12 and claims 24-26 depend from and further restrict claim 23, and also patentably distinguish over the references in their present form.

III. Conclusion

For at least all the above reasons, claims 1-4, 12-15 and 23-26 patentably distinguish over the cited art in their present form, and this application is now believed to be in condition for allowance. It is, accordingly, respectfully requested that the Examiner so find and issue a Notice of Allowance in due course.

The Examiner is invited to call the undersigned at the below-listed telephone number if in the opinion of the Examiner such a telephone conference would expedite or aid the prosecution and examination of this application.

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Respectfully submitted,

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